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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003725

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SUBJECT: KARZAI'S INAUGURATION - LEGITIMACY, POLITICAL ROOTS, AND PROMISES

REF: KABUL 3700

Classified By: Political Counselor Annie Pforzheimer, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Karzai's November 19 inauguration ceremony emphasized his domestic and international legitimacy, possibly laying to rest his government's fears that their troubled electoral victory would come back to undermine his second term. Karzai's strong roots with the "mujahedeen" and other traditional leaders who helped him win and help him govern were in full display. His speech covered a few key points - wins among Afghans and international alike were strong statements on taking over security from NATO/ISAF within five years, appointing good ministers and "ending a culture of impunity" - but lacked details and for some, inspiration. End Summary.

A More Solid Footing

¶2. (C) A very solid international presence -- 14 foreign ministers, the President of Pakistan, the Vice President of Iran, Aga Khan -- bolstered Karzai's November 19 inauguration ceremony with the message of world acceptance of his legitimate election victory. Karzai referred several times to the international community in his speech, thanking the Saudi government for its help encouraging Taliban reconciliation, NATO/ISAF and especially the United States for their contribution to Afghan security, and Japan's recent announcement of \$5 billion over the next five years in development aid.

¶3. (C) Karzai's domestic attendees were equally important to show that he is ruling with a broad mandate. Along with his cabinet and Parliamentary leadership, representatives from all 34 provinces attended. In addition, all the "mujahedeen" of the 1980's and 1990's, including Dostum, Mohaqeq, Mohsehni and the two vice presidents (Khalili and Fahim) were highly visible in the front row next to the President. Although Dr. Abdullah did not attend the ceremony, Karzai singled him out several times in the speech, along with other presidential candidates, and asked that Abdullah participate in a future government in the spirit of unity. Ashraf Ghani and Mirwais Yasini were in attendance.

¶4. (C) The speech and the final benediction by Professor Mojaddedi emphasized Karzai's legitimacy 'against attacks by outsiders' in Mojaddedi's words. Karzai's cryptic statement that "only the people's vote can give legitimacy to the government" came as part of his praise to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and his exhortation to improve the electoral law and "fully Afghanize" the process - i.e., ratify the newer version of the law which would take foreign experts out of the Electoral Complaints Commission. IEC Chairman Ludin, highly biased in favor of Karzai during the election, sat immediately behind the President.

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¶ 15. (C) In the section devoted to security issues, Karzai repeatedly asserted that Afghanistan wants to be in the lead in ensuring security and stability throughout the country and in taking over detention responsibilities. He moderated his usual criticisms of civilian casualties with acknowledgement of vast improvements in cooperation between NATO/ISAF and the government. His rhetoric about taking over security responsibility "by the next five years" is exactly what Secretary Clinton emphasized to him the evening of November 18 (septel) would be crucial to continued U.S. support.

¶ 16. (SBU) On reconciliation, as expected Karzai made no specific proposals except to reiterate his campaign platform that a "Loya Jirga" should be held to discuss a way forward. He avoided using either "Taliban" or "insurgency" in the entire speech, but invited "disenchanted compatriots" to reintegrate if they "are not directly linked to international terrorism" and "leave peacefully and accept the Constitution."

...And Appoint Competent Ministers

¶ 17. (SBU) One of only a few applause lines was the statement that "the ministers of Afghanistan must possess integrity and be professionals serving the nation" followed by the assertion that they would "end the culture of impunity." This topic was the most eagerly awaited by internationals and Afghans alike - but also the topic for which words (vs.

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concrete actions) were likely to make any real difference. Karzai's signal that his cabinet would be clean and competent was undermined by the visual impact of his two vice presidents, well-known warlords, flanking him as they took their oaths of office.

¶ 18. (U) On governance, Karzai did point to some specific issues such as the need to better enforce the constitutional provision for asset declaration by senior officials; the need for all government servants (which he declared himself also to be) to undergo tests of their fitness to hold office; and to build the capacity of and upgrade the High Office of Oversight for the Implementation of Anti-Corruption Strategy. He also suggested that a conference in Kabul on the subject of corruption would help uncover "new and effective ways" to fight this problem.

Women, the Economy and the Region

¶ 19. (U) Karzai promised to promote the rights of women, to develop rural areas and improve job opportunities for youth, and to maintain a market economy as the framework for future growth. He called on the international community to channel more of its development funds through the government budget, aiming for this method to reach 50 percent of all aid spending within two years.

¶ 110. (SBU) One of the most important areas of the speech was Karzai's discussion of the region and Afghanistan's need for both a strategic partnership with the United States and good relations with the rest of the Islamic world and with its neighbors, particularly Iran and Pakistan. He called special attention to Zardari and asked for a commitment by the Government of Pakistan to fight terrorism as a common threat. Initial Afghan reactions to the speech flagged this statement as a new and constructive public line with Pakistan.

Missing in Action: Abdullah

¶11. (U) Abdullah gave a press statement following the inauguration, in which he stated that he did not participate in the elections in order to be in Karzai's cabinet (again) and has no interest in joining the government. He expressed his commitment to advancing changes in the government, including the establishment of a parliamentary system, the direct election of governors, constitutional reform and a more independent IEC. Abdullah's political ally, Speaker of the Parliament Yunus Qanooni, reportedly did not attend.

Also Missing In Action: Inspiration

¶12. (C) Initial Afghan reactions track with internationals': it was not a bad speech, and usefully addressed some key issues, but was thin on which specific actions that Karzai would take to make his promises come true. The speech also lacked the spark that Karzai had been known for in his public addresses in previous years - a sense of communicating with the audience more directly, and generating personal trust and connection. Some Afghan skeptics expressed guarded pleasure at the speech, but a common thread in Afghan reactions is that they have heard these particular generalities before.

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